Of Closet-Prayer.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN

AT

WHITE-HALL,

On *SUNDAY*, *Aug.* 27. 1693.

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MATTH. vi. 6.

But thou, when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in ſecret, and thy Father, which ſeeth thee in ſecret, ſhall reward thee openly.

THeſe words are part of our Saviour's Diſcourſes in the Mount, wherein he is cautioning his Followers of thoſe uſual Schemes of Hypocriſie, by which the Phariſees had made themſelves ſo remarkable: of theſe he gives a twofold Inſtance, that of diſpoſing their Alms and Charity, which they were wont to perform, with *ſound of trumpet*, or open Oſtentation to the World, of what they were a doing;

v. 2. and that of praying *in the corners of the ſtreets*, that they may be ſeen of Men. In oppoſition to which, he directs his Diſciples to affect (at leaſt) ſo much of Privacy in all Religious Acts, as may make it evident, their deſign is chiefly to approve themſelves before God, who ſees the heart, and values the act, from the inward intention and deſign only. *When thou doſt alms, let not thy left hand know, what thy right hand doth*, &c. *v.* 4. and *when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet.*

It was a frequent Obſervation our Saviour had made elſewhere, of the horrid Hypocriſie of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, and *Chief* among the Jews in his time; againſt which he denounces ſo many ſeveral Woes, *Mat.* 23. 25, 27. and ſo on. He does it in this Chapter, both as to their Alms, and their Devotions. My Text is concern'd with their Hypocriſie, in all their Acts of pretended Devotion, *v.* 5. *When thou prayeſt, thou ſhalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray ſtanding in the Synagogues, and in the corners of the ſtreets, that they may be ſeen of men:* wherein we may take notice of the poſture, and the places they choſe to pray in, in both which they might be *moſt ſeen*; their poſture, *ſtanding*; the place, *the Synagogues and corners of the ſtreets.*

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As to their poſture, of *ſtanding* at their Prayers: We muſt not ſuppoſe this was unwarrantable in it ſelf, becauſe it was much in uſe, both with the Jews and Chriſtians of old. Inſomuch that the very Phraſe, ſometimes, in Scripture, for praying in publick Solemnities, is, that of *ſtanding before the Lord*; from whence, that Jewiſh Expreſſion, *Sine ſtationibus non ſubſiſteret Mundus*, The World could not ſubſiſt, without the *ſtandings*, or Prayers of the Church. And the Chriſtians, in the firſt Ages, had their certain ſeaſons, wherein they perform'd their publick Services of the Church, *ſtanding*; whence that term of their *Stationary Days*; *Quum publicis ſtationibus Vota ſua perſolvit Eccleſia*, When the Church perform'd her Offices of Prayer, by publick *Stations*, or *ſtanding*. So that this poſture is not reflected on, as unwarrantable in it ſelf, but as choſen by the Hypocrites of that Age, that they might be the better ſeen at their Devotions.

Then, for the place, they not only choſe the *Synagogues*, but ſtood in the *chief corners of the ſtreets*. *In triviis* (as the *Latine* has it). Probably, in places where three or four ſtreets met together, where Paſſengers in each of thoſe ſtreets might diſcern, and reverence their plauſible Holineſs. *Verily*, ſaith our Saviour, *they have their reward*. That is, they have what they aim'd at, and much good may it

do

do 'em. But what good can this poor Recompence do them, when they ſhall come to be approv'd or condemn'd by him, who knows the inſides of things, and values them accordingly? *But thou, when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet*, &c.

That which I ſhall purſue from theſe words, ſhall be this, to lay before you the expediency and reaſonableneſs of *ſecret* or *cloſet-Prayer*. If you wou'd approve your ſelves to God indeed, you muſt be frequent in your privateſt Retirements for Prayer. The Caution in my Text directs, not only, *to enter into our cloſets*, but, when we are there, to *ſhut* our *doors* about us.

Before I proceed to the Argument; it may not be amiſs, briefly to premiſe, that as this Caution, in the Text, does by no means exclude the great duty incumbent upon us, both as to the Worſhip of God in publick, and alſo that in our Families: ſo, though this direction ſtrictly mentions that of *entering into our cloſets, and ſhutting our doors, and praying to God in ſecret*; it does not ſo far neceſſitate our privacy in this Action, that we are bound to take all imaginable care, that no one in the World ſhould know, or ſuſpect we do it. No, it may ſometimes be of uſe, that others ſhould underſtand our practice in this kind, that they, by our example, might learn, and be encouraged

courag'd to do the ſame. How often may the Parent's, or the Maſter's *known* and *obſerv'd* Cuſtom of ſecret Prayer, inſtil a Principle into the Minds of thoſe that are under them, and that are deſirous to imitate them, that they alſo take up the ſame way; and from thence, habituate themſelves to thoſe Exerciſes of Religion, which become a future ground of their own retir'd Intimacies and Acquaintance with God.

All the deſign of this place is, That Men ſhou'd not take up with a formal and pompous ſhew of Religion in the Acts of it: that they ſhould not court the Eye and Obſervation of the World in all they do of this kind; and make it their only deſign *to be ſeen of men:* but that they ſhould delight themſelves in thoſe Exerciſes of Religion, that are leſs obſerv'd by Men, wherein God and their own Conſciences are the chief Parties, and, betwixt theſe only, it appears, that we are in earneſt.

In purſuing therefore this Subject, I ſhall do theſe two things.

I. Shew upon what accounts this part of Divine Worſhip, in our moſt private and ſecret Retirements, becomes ſo reaſonable and neceſſary a Duty.

II. What ought to be our Carriage and Behaviour toward God, in theſe our Secrecies of Prayer:

er: Which laſt may ſerve for Application of the former.

I. Upon what accounts, this part of Divine Worſhip, in our moſt private and ſecret Retirements, becomes ſo reaſonable and neceſſary a Duty. And this may be argued from theſe three or four Heads.

1. This mainly avoids the Charge of Hypocriſie in our Profeſſion, or Acts of Devotion.

2. We have, herein, the greater liberty of particularizing our Wants before God.

3. We may, with greater collection of Mind and Thoughts, ſerve God in theſe our private Retirements.

4. This ſpecial Promiſe in the Text, That God that ſeeth us *in ſecret*, himſelf will *reward us openly*, will appear of great Moment.

1. This Cuſtom of worſhipping God in ſecret, mainly avoids the Charge of Hypocriſie in our Profeſſion or Acts of Devotion. And this is that, that ſeems chiefly the occaſion of this Caution in the Text. Our Bleſſed Saviour drives plainly at it, in both the Inſtances, of Charity towards the Poor, and Devotion towards God. In the former, we are not to do as *the Hypocrites do*, to ſound a Trumpet before us; no, not to let our *left hand know what our right hand doth.* In the latter we

we are not to make it our buſineſs *to pray ſtanding in the ſynagogues, or in the corners of the ſtreets*, but when we pray, *to enter into our cloſets*, &c. So that to follow the reaſon of this Duty, as it is particularly grounded againſt Hypocriſie in the performance of our Worſhip toward God, it will not be amiſs to ſhew,

(1.) That Hypocriſie, where it is the only Deſign and Propoſal, in any part of Religion whatſoever, does actually deſtroy the true and juſt end of the whole undertaking.

(2.) That we cannot ſo effectually make out our Sincerity in any Acts of Divine Worſhip, where they are only in publick, and to be *ſeen of men.*

(1.) That Hypocriſie, where it is the only Deſign, in any Act of Religion whatſoever, does actually deſtroy the true and juſt end of the whole undertaking. For,

Firſt, Such an one does not intereſt himſelf in any one Action, or Performance of *Real* Religion. His deſign only (as he is an Hypocrite) is to make a ſhew of doing that which he intends not. Hence he borrows his name from the Stage-player, whoſe Employment is to perſonate Men, and Things; that is, to act *their Perſons*, whom they know themſelves not to *be*; in *Things*, wherein they know they are not really concern'd. Thus the Hypocrite, in all his Actions that bear a

ſhow and ſemblance in Religion, his deſign only is to act a part, and not to *be* the Perſon, or *do* the Action *really*, which he ſeems to *be* or *do*. Thus, when ſuch an one gives Alms, he does but act the part of a *truly* charitable Man. He does not give in pity and commiſeration to the need of others; he does not give in conſcience toward God, or in tenderneſs for that ſtamp and Image of God, which he ſees upon his needy Brother, or from any ſuch noble and generous Principle, that Religion dictates: But he gives, that he may avoid the Reproach of a niggardly and penurious Man; he gives, that his Name may live after him, and may ſwell in the mouths of others, applauding him as great and generous, or devout and religious, *&c.* and ſo, while his deſign is only to perſonate the Man that is Religiouſly charitable, he muſt needs, as to himſelf, deſtroy the true deſign and end of the Religious Act, becauſe he does not intereſt himſelf at all in it. So, in this Inſtance in my Text; when the Hypocrite prays, he only acts the part of the devout Man; he is not concern'd in the Realities of Devotion, becauſe he deſigns nothing, but that Men might apprehend him a zealous, holy Man; ſo that not *really* doing the Action he repreſents, he loſes the Privileges, or Rewards of ſuch an Action, becauſe the Action it ſelf is not *really* perform'd by him.

him. Like the Actor upon the Stage, though he perſonates the Majeſty and Grandeur of a King, the wiſe Dictates and Projects of the Stateſ-man, the Valour and Conduct of the Nobleſt General; yet does not he by any means receive the *real* Honours due to any of theſe Characters, but, merely the Applauſe of preſent Spectators, and a little Stipend for Bread, which is all he aimed at. So our Saviour limits the Reward of this Actor to the Merits of the Performance, *v.* 2, 5. *Verily, I ſay unto you, they have their reward.* All they propounded, perhaps, was the Applauſe of Men, or eſtabliſhing to themſelves a preſent Intereſt, and this they may attain. But it is then only, when a Man's Sincerity in Worſhip is diſcern'd by him that ſees into the ſecrets of Hearts; it is then only, and they are ſuch only that reap the proper Fruits of Religion, becauſe he that *ſeeth them in ſecret, will reward them openly.* Beſides,

Secondly, I may add, Hypocriſie in any Acts of Worſhip towards God, does offer ſo immediate an affront to the High and Holy One, that it muſt needs deſtroy the true ends of that Devotion, it diſſembles. For the Hypocrite, in thus doing, does either befool himſelf, and think he can mock God, as not diſcerning the inwards of his Mind, and ſo robs him of the Glories of his Omniſcience and Omnipreſence; or elſe, he has

thoſe mean thoughts of God, as eaſie enough to take up with the foppiſh ſhews and oſtentations he makes, and ſo robs him of the Honour of his infinite Holineſs and Wiſdom; or elſe, in a word, plainly defies God, that be he as holy, or wiſe, or diſcerning as he will, yet the Man will not ſet his heart aright towards him. Nor will make one ſtep further in Religion, than what mere outward Show and Oſtentation will amount to. Now there is enough, in any of theſe Inſtances of Affront done to the Divine Majeſty, that may juſtly cut the Hypocrite off from all Pretenſions to any good Reward for theſe pretended Acts of Devotion.

How daring a Sinner is the Hypocrite, to think that either God does not ſee, or if he does ſee, will not concern himſelf; or if God does ſee, and will intereſt himſelf, he cares not; but, if he can attain the preſent ends of his diſſembling with the World, and God, he will run the hazard of all the reſt. No wonder that in the Holy Scriptures we find Hell mark'd out as the moſt proper and direct portion of the Hypocrite; that whoſoever is to be *damn'd to purpoſe*, has his place aſſign'd there, with the Hypocrite, *Matt.* 24. 51. *The Lord of that ſervant ſhall come---- and ſhall appoint him his portion with the hypocrite, there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth.* So that, we ſee, the reaſon-

reaſonableneſs of this Duty of keeping up the Worſhip of God in ſecret, and in our Cloſets, where God only is privy to it, that we may thereby avoid the Charge of Hypocriſie in our Profeſſion, when we ſee in what dangerous circumſtances the Hypocrite ſtands toward God; eſpecially conſidering, that without this cuſtom of worſhipping God in ſecret, we cannot ſo well juſtify our Integrity by all other performances of publick Devotion: which is the ſecond Particular under this Head, which I am now to make out.

(2.) We cannot ſo effectually make out our Sincerity in any Acts of Devotion, where they are only in publick, and to be *ſeen of men*. For in this conſcientious uſage, chiefly, we declare, we have no Regard to any thing, but a ſenſe of our Duty toward God, and the Zeal we have for Communion with himſelf; and that, in mere reſpect to the Obligation that lies upon us, of rendring to God his juſt Worſhip: therefore we retire from the eyes of Men, to perform it; where no other Motives ſeem'd to influence us, but the *Neceſſity*, or the *Pleaſure* of the Duty. We take no witneſs to our Devotions but God, and our own Conſciences: and by that, we make it evident, That, as we deſire to approve our ſelves chiefly to himſelf and our own minds; ſo, we expect no Rewards, or Advantage elſewhere, but from him, who *ſeeth in ſecret*,

ſecret, and will reward openly. It is true, there may be a worm of Hypocriſie at the root of our Devotion, even in our moſt ſecret, and unſeen dealings with God; that is, we may pleaſe and ſatisfy our minds with the thoughts that ſuch a Work, or Duty, is done, and over, urg'd to it by the enforcements of natural Conſcience, perſwading us of the neceſſity of ſomething of this kind. But then, as this is leſs likely, and we may generally preſume, that the conſcience of performing the Duty it ſelf, (which nothing but our regard to God, and his Commands, hath influenc'd) may alſo keep awake our care and concernment, as to the frame and diſpoſition of our minds; that we reſt not in a ſlighty performance only: ſo, it is too probable, that where any one is conſiderably frequent and diligent in attending publick Solemnities (in the mean time never retiring to his Cloſet) he is little other than an Hypocrite; at leaſt, he has not this ſatisfaction to reflect upon himſelf, nor this witneſs within of his own Truth and Sincerity, as to Religion, and the Fear of God; becauſe there are ſo many other Reaſons that might induce the Man to join with others in publick Solemnities: The Cuſtoms and Faſhion of the place we live in, our natural inclination to herd and aſſociate with one another; a deſire to ſee others, and to be ſeen of them; a diverting

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our ſelves for ſuch a part of time, that otherwiſe might hang upon our hands; our natural Notions of God, and neceſſity of giving him ſome kind of Worſhip: our making an intereſt with ſome good Man, that may be induc'd to value us for this appearance of Devotion, *&c.* Theſe, and other ſuch conſiderations as theſe, may perhaps have force enough to cement us in the common bond of Worſhip toward God (and it is well that any conſiderations do ſerve to keep up the face of publick Solemnities.) But in this our daily cuſtom of ſecret Prayer, there may, perhaps, appear no other motive, that we can reflect upon, as urging us to it, but the great regard we have to this indiſpenſable Command of our Bleſſed Lord, which bids us, *when we pray to enter into our cloſets*, and there *ſhut our doors* about us.

So much for this *firſt* Head of Argument.

2. I may argue the Reaſonableneſs and Expediency of this great Duty of *praying to the Father in ſecret*, from this conſideration, that we have, in ſuch times, and places as theſe, the greater liberty of particularizing our wants before God. There are particular concernments, wherein every pious Soul may intereſt Providence, betwixt himſelf and his gracious Father, of which publick Forms are not incluſive, at leaſt, not plainly expreſſive of them; nay, ſuch, perhaps, as may not be very convenient

convenient to concern publick Societies withal. There may be ſome particular circumſtances of Guilt, which it is not neceſſary we ſhould lay open to the World, in our publick Confeſſions, which yet our gracious Father, not only allows, but encourages; nay, expects that we ſhould, in frequent Acts of Repentance, acknowledge before him, and expreſly recite them, in order to our Pardon, and Reconciliation with himſelf. There are particular wants, that preſs and urge us, which we need not trouble a multitude in knowing them; and particular ſupplies, and deliverances, and experiences, in this or that Inſtance in Providence, which it might be impertinent, and tedious to others to rehearſe in their preſence, or return our thanks for them.

But, we have one who is the Authour, and Fountain of all our Supplies and Enjoyments, and will never be wearied out, either with our freſh Supplications, or repeated Acknowledgments; with him we may have our full, and unupbraided Liberty of expoſtulating in all our fears and uneaſineſs; of pouring out our Souls in all the meltings of Repentance, the paſſions of Love, Joy, Submiſſion and Reſignation, with all the vigorous warmth of Converſe and Communion with God. So that, for the conveniency of declaring our wants, enlarging our confeſſions, repeating our thanks, open-

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ing our Souls in all the tranſports of Love, and Joy, and moſt free and affecting Reciprocations of his Love and Favour, *when we pray, we ſhould often enter into our cloſets, and there ſhut the door, and pray to our Father which ſeeth us in ſecret.* And indeed, where Endearments are great, and the Paſſions of Love more than ordinarily high, and mutual, there is a natural deſire of Solitude, and Retiredneſs, that there be no interruption, no miſtaken, miſ-apprehended indecencies in the mutual Iſſues and Careſſes of Love. *Oh my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, and in the ſecret places of the ſtairs; let me ſee thy countenance, and let me hear thy voice; for ſweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely*---- ſaith *Solomon*, Cant. 2. 14. How many a long night of Intercourſe and Communion with God, had *David!* ſometimes watering his couch with his penitential Tears; and ſometimes preventing the watches of it to praiſe God; that he might do both, more freely and uninterruptedly! It is not probable he could make ſuch particular confeſſions of his Murder and Adultery, ſuch frequent declarations of the weights and burdens of his Soul, in publick Solemnities, as he did in private, betwixt himſelf and God. Although afterward, for the vindication both of the Juſtice and Mercy of God, and for the future Inſtruction of the Church, he had them digeſted into their ſo-

lemn Services. So that, if we conſult our own particular neceſſities, Nature it ſelf might, ſo far, direct us to purſue our own Intereſt, as to take the advantage of frequent Retirements in ſecret, to lay before God, our immediate and peculiar Concernments. And he that has been negligent, in opportunities of this nature, does thereby proclaim himſelf one, that has as yet been poorly awaken'd to any ſenſe and concernment for his own Intereſts.

3. It is further highly reaſonable, That ſo we may, with greater collection of Mind and Thoughts, ſerve God in theſe our private Retirements. The Apoſtle brings this as the Reſult of his whole Caſuiſtical Diſcourſe, about a married, and an unmarried State, *viz.* that all he had alledged, was chiefly with this deſign, *That they might attend the Lord without diſtraction*, 1 Cor. 7. 35.

And as to this Particular; there is certainly great advantage in our private retiring before God; we make our ſelves more capable of gathering up the loyns of our Minds, and recollecting our Thoughts to a greater degree of Seriouſneſs and Conſiſtency, which is the *Life* and *Soul* of all Religious Worſhip whatever. In publick, we may meet with many accidental Avocations, but in private, ſeldom any but thoſe of our own Minds, which are ſo much the better check'd, and kept within

within bounds, as they have fewer extrinſick Objects to amuze, or encumber them. So that it is not improper Advice in a modern Authour, that where any live ſo as to have the conveniencies, they would do well, to ſet apart one particular place in the Houſe, where no other concernment ſhou'd be manag'd, but their private Acts of Devotion betwixt God and their own Souls; that ſo by cuſtom and preſcription, all their worldly or vain Thoughts might be afraid or aſham'd to enter, having been ſo long baniſh'd thence. Our Bleſſed Lord himſelf, that needed never any precautions againſt thoſe vain Avocations, which the beſt of Chriſtians are peſter'd with, yet delighted much in ſolitude for Prayer. See *Mark* 6. 46.

4. *Laſtly*, The great Promiſe in the Text ought to be an abundant Argument for our frequent retiring into our Cloſets, to perform our private Supplications and Prayers there: *Thy Father which ſeeth thee in ſecret, ſhall reward thee openly.* Wherein there are theſe two or three things conſiderable.

(1.) That, be we never ſo retir'd, we have to do with one that can ſee us in the moſt ſecret receſſes, to which we can betake our ſelves.

(2.) That he himſelf that thus ſees us, has undertaken to give us our *Reward*.

(3.) Not only ſo, but, in the end, he will do it *openly* enough.

(1.) Be we never ſo retir'd, we have to do with one that can ſee us in the moſt ſecret receſſes, to which we can betake our ſelves. This may be our abundant Comfort and Aſſurance, that we don't ſcatter our Prayers into a void and empty ſpace, or mingle our breath, only with the ſilent Air, that makes no returns to the greateſt noiſe, but a thin and unſatisfactory *Echo*; but we do as eaſily with the deep and inward Groans of our Minds, without the utterance of one word, reach the ears of God, as the moſt loud and united Exclamations of greateſt Aſſemblies have ever done. And this, probably, is the Ground of that Caution, which ſo immediately follows my Text, *v.* 7. *When ye pray, uſe not vain repetitions, as the Heathen do, for they think that they ſhall be heard for their much ſpeaking*, &c. In which Caution, we are not to ſuppoſe, our Saviour forbids all earneſt repetition in Prayer, becauſe he himſelf did three times together urge the ſame thing in the ſame words, when he was in the height of his Agony, *Father, if it be poſſible*, &c. Nor are we from hence to collect, the unneceſſary uſe of long Prayers, becauſe our Lord himſelf *continued* ſometimes *all night in prayer*. But, in this place, he reproaches particularly thoſe repetitions, that were us'd in the *Gentile-Worſhip*, with ſo much Clamour and Noiſe, as if by loud, and horrid Exclamations only,

ly, their Gods were to be rouz'd and awakened to their help. Thus their Poets repreſent thoſe Heathen-Devotions, in ſome ſuch Inſtances as theſe, when they bring in their Prieſts, for a long time together, making their noiſy and inſignificant Outcries, ἰὼ ἰὼ ἰὼ, φεῦ φεῦ φεῦ, ἐ ἐ ἐ ἐ, without any other addition of any form'd Requeſt. It is ſome ſuch clamorous, and incondite Devotion as this, that *Elijah* derides in the Prophets of *Baal*; when they were crying from morning to evening, *O Baal, hear us*, 1 Kings 18. 26, 27, 28. *He mocked them, and ſaid, cry aloud: for your God is either talking, or purſuing, or in a journey, or peradventure he ſleeps, and muſt be awaked: And they cryed aloud, and cut themſelves after their manner with knives, and lancers, till the blood guſhed out* -------- This Cuſtom of loud and weariſome repetitions, the *Comœdian* reflects ſharply upon; *Obe, jam deſine Deos, Uxor, gratulando obtundere*------ "Ceaſe, Wife, now at "length, wearying the Gods with thanking them "that your Daughter is found again; unleſs you "meaſure them by your own Wit, and think they "can underſtand nothing, but what you tell them "an hundred times over.

It is not Clamour, or Noiſe, that our God is taken with; nor needs he it to awaken, or make him underſtand our meaning; for his Ear is in our Cloſets, and within our Hearts, to hear and obſerve

obſerve the moſt ſecret and retir'd Prayer we can frame there. Poor *Hannah*'s Prayer, utter'd ſo much in ſecret betwixt her Soul and God, that it made *Eli* judge, ſhe was either drunk, or mad, yet had its effectual reward and return from God, 1 *Sam.* 1. 13, 20. And the Jews, of whom the *Romans* conjectur'd, that they worſhipp'd nothing but the Clouds, becauſe when they brake into their Temple, and went to ſpoil the Inward Sanctuary, and the Holieſt of all, they found no Images of Worſhip there; yet had the Jews, I ſay, the *Shecinah*, or the Divine and Glorious Preſence peculiarly reſiding in that inmoſt Receſs; where their Oracles were given, and their Sins atoned and expiated. This, therefore, in part, may be our encouragement, that he, with whom we have to do, is preſent in the moſt ſecret Retirements, and equally hears in our Cloſets, as in any other place. But further--- As he ſees us, ſo,

(2.) He hath alſo in this Promiſe undertaken to *reward* us for thoſe Services, which no other Eye is privy to. And this we find ſet in oppoſition to thoſe wretched, and trifling Rewards, which Hypocrites, by their publick Shows, and Oſtentation of Worſhip, peculiarly deſign, *viz.* the Applauſe of Men and their good Opinion---- *Verily, they have their reward.* They have that they look'd for. But then, as to theſe more ſecret and unſeen

unſeen acts of devotion, God himſelf undertakes to give out *his* peculiar rewards, they having had no other regard but to him only.

And what may we expect when ſo rich and bounteous a Maſter undertakes to diſpenſe it, *himſelf*, as a proper recompence! Thoſe only can beſt tell, who have met with the pleaſurable returns of his Love, in their ſecrets of converſe with him. Thoſe, who in their Cloſets, have met with the joys of Pardon, after long ſtruggles of ſorrow and brokenneſs of Spirit; thoſe, who have met with great enlargements of mind, and near intimacies of Communion with God, after long deadneſs, and indiſpoſition of mind (which hath been more afflictive and diſcouraging, than all the ill accidents of preſent Life cou'd have been) thoſe, who have found the deſireable ſupplies of Grace, for ſubduing ſome unruly Luſts, and to help them, againſt ſome very prevalent temptations, which they have a long time conflicted with; ſuch as theſe only can tell, what it is to be *at preſent* rewarded by God, in their privateſt retirements before him.

How many a pious Soul have enter'd their Cloſets *weeping*, and have *born* ſuch *precious ſeed* with them, that they have come out thence, *bringing their ſheaves with them!* (that I may allude to that paſſage of the *Pſalmiſt*, *Pſ.* 126. 6.) How many have

have gone in with a dead and ſtreighten'd heart, that have come out again full of Heavenly and fervid Affections and Inclinations of mind toward God! And theſe are the firſt Inſtances of his rewarding them that *pray* to him *in ſecret*. And ſuch Realities are theſe, and derive ſuch ſolid and unqueſtionable Pleaſures to the mind, that all the fantaſtick Pleaſures and Rewards of this World, bear no proportion even to theſe leſs and unobſerv'd Recompences, which ſuch do, *at preſent*, meet with from God. But then,

(3.) *Laſtly*, He hath further undertaken, not only to give them theſe ſecret and hidden Rewards, which good Men find in the inward Pleaſures of their own minds; but will alſo, in the great upſhot of things, *reward them openly*. This oftentimes befals them in this World, in very ſignal Returns of Prayer, by many and evident Anſwers, in the preſent Diſpoſals of Divine Providence, when God has condeſcended actually to accompliſh for ſuch, the deſires of their hearts, that they are capable of triumphing with *David*, and ſaying as he did, *Pſ.* 34. 6. *This poor man cryed, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles*. This is properly an open and publick avowing the good Man's ſecret Appeals and Addreſſes to God.

But then, much more *openly*, may they expect to

to be rewarded at laſt, when, in the preſence of Angels, and the whole World of Men, that will ſtand concern'd at the Bar and Tribunal above, God himſelf will not diſdain to own and acknowledge the Services, the Acts of Devotion and Worſhip that ſome have perform'd before him, in the truth and integrity of their minds, when there were no Witneſſes but his Eye only. "Lo this is "he that made me his truſt and the ground of his "dependance, and confidence, and now he finds "I have not fail'd or forſaken him! Thus *David* makes his appeals to God as the great Regiſter of his Prayers and Tears, *Pſ.* 56. 8. *Put thou my tears into thy bottle; are they not in thy book?* And God himſelf by his Prophet declares how he will own ſuch at laſt, *Mal.* 3. 16, 17. *A Book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name, and they ſhall be mine, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, in that day when I make up my Jewels; and I will ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own Son that ſerveth him.*

Happy Souls indeed! when they ſhall be openly avowed by God, and all the World ſhall come to underſtand their Wiſdom, as well as their vaſt Privileges in thoſe Secrecies of Communion and Intereſt, they once kept up betwixt themſelves and God. Which (by the way) might not a little reflect upon the Imprudence and Folly of the Hy-

pocrite in the management of his own great deſign. The main Motive, we ſee, of his Devotions, is, the Obſervation and Applauſe of Men; what an Honour would ſuch an one reckon it at laſt, to have God proclaiming his Faithfulneſs in ſerving him, in the preſence of the whole World! but this Reward they have anticipated, in taking up with the *feeble* Applauſe of *deluded* Men in this World.

And thus much may ſerve for Enquiry into the Reaſons and Grounds of Obligation, that lies upon us for performing this Duty of *entering into our cloſets*, and there praying to our *Father in ſecret*.

II. Come we briefly to conſider that Deportment, and Carriage of ours, which is neceſſary, in our Secrecies of Addreſs and Communion with God. I ſhall lay it before you only in three neceſſary Requiſites.

1. That when we perform theſe ſecret Acts of Worſhip, we take great care to come with all Purity of Mind.

2. That we do it with all imaginable Humility and Reverence toward God.

3. With all Earneſtneſs and Fervour of Mind, ſuch as we may not be capable of expreſſing in our publick Solemnities, in the view of others.

1. That

1. That when we perform theſe ſecret Acts of Worſhip, we take great care to come with all Purity of Mind. It is a Rule that ſhould govern all parts of Devotion; but this more eſpecially, becauſe this is a Duty wherein we pretend more intirely, againſt Hypocriſie, and more immediately place our ſelves before God, becauſe no other Eye ſees us.

It has been the obſervation of the Heathen Moraliſts of old, that all the Acts of Devotion, which wicked Men at any time performed, could not charm the Gods, but they proved little other than the *Sacrifice of Fools*. It is an excellent expreſſion of one amongſt them, Ἡ τῶν προσφερομένων πολυτέλεια, τιμὴ εἰς θεὸν οὐ γίνεται, εἰ μὴ μετὰ τοῦ ἐνθέου φρονήματος προσήγοιτο. Δῶρα γὰρ, καὶ θυηπολίαι ἀφρόνων, πυρὸς τροφή. i.e. *The greateſt abundance, and profuſeſt coſtlineſs of Oblations, bring no honour to God, except they are offered by a Divine Mind. For the Gifts and Sacrifices of Fools, or vicious Men, are no other than mere Food to the Fire they are thrown into.* The Holy Scriptures ſpeak higher, Prov. 15. 8. *The ſacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?* Hence that blind Man, whom our Saviour had reſtored to ſight, argues with the Jews, from a common and indiſputable Principle of their own, that He muſt needs be a good Man, that had done ſo great a work. Joh. 9. 31. *Now*

we know that God heareth not ſinners; but if a man be a worſhipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. Hence that Apoſtolical Injunction, 1 Tim. 2. 8. *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands*---- It is an Obſervation that *Philo Judæus* makes of the *Eſſenes*, whom he repreſented as a moſt Religious Sect amongſt the Jews; ἐπαίρουσι πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν, &c. "They lift up their eyes and hands "towards Heaven; *eyes*, that have been Religiouſ-"ly reſtrain'd from any thing unworthy that place: "and *hands*, that have been chaſt from all the Defile-"ments of Bribery and unlawful Gain; and there-"fore are their Prayers of ſo great Eſteem and "Value.

Agreeable to which, was that Reſolution of the *Pſalmiſt*, Pſ. 26. 6. *I will waſh mine hands in innocency, ſo will I compaſs thine altar, O Lord.* This ought to be our eſpecial Concernment, as a moſt neceſſary Qualification in all our Dealings with God, that we lift not up filthy hands, nor breathe out our Prayers from impure and vicious Minds; becauſe we thereby deſtroy the Ground and Foundation of our Hopes and Expectations in Prayer, and expoſe our Perſons to the diſpleaſure of God, by thoſe very Acts by which we wou'd obtain his favour. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatſoever we ask, we receive of him, becauſe we keep his commandments, and*

do

do thoſe things that are pleaſing in his ſight, 1 Joh. 3. 21, 22.

2. We are alſo to do it with all imaginable Humility and Reverence toward God. And, indeed, it is *then* chiefly, that we can vindicate to the *Searcher of all Hearts*, the truth of that Reverence and Dread we pretend toward him, when we can equally expreſs it in our *cloſets*, where no Eye ſees us, as in the view of a whole Aſſembly. Alas! every *Hypocrite* can, in the preſence of others, proſtrate himſelf; and with Eyes lift up, noiſie Groans, vehement knocking upon the Breaſt, humble geſtures of Body, and all the outward Forms and Poſtures of Reverence: He can (I ſay) dreſs and adorn his Publick Devotions, and in theſe inſtances, perhaps, may have the advantage of the more devout and pious Soul. As the *Ape*, in its Acts of Imitation, ſometimes over-does the *Man*; or as the *Man of Compliment*, in his Courtſhips and vehement Proteſtations, will ſpeak and pretend beyond the *Friend*. But the unqueſtionable Proof of *Devotion in earneſt*, is, when a Man, in his privateſt Retirements behaves equally as humbly and reverently toward God, as if he knew himſelf within the view of all the World. He then plainly ſhews he has a ſenſe of God upon his Mind indeed, and that he believes he is dealing with that Majeſty of Heaven and Earth, before whom the

Angels

Angels cover their faces and their feet. It would be an ill return of the Subject upon his Lord and Sovereign, if, after his Lord ſhou'd condeſcend in ſo much Favour to him, as to retire from his Nobles and Attendants, to careſs him the freelier in ſecret; the Subject ſhould forget the diſtance, and preſume upon all the ſacred Characters of Majeſty, by a ſlovenly Familiarity, that would be *no where* allowable. How much more then ought we to judge it neceſſary, to ſhew all humble and reverend Demeanour toward God, though never ſo ſecretly withdrawn from the World's eye; for he does not call us into theſe Receſſes, to acquit us of our juſt Veneration, and Dread of him, but to increaſe and maintain it in more abundant Reality. *Be not raſh with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be haſty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few,* Eccl. 5. 20.

3. I add, *laſtly*, we muſt take care to do it with all earneſtneſs and fervour of Mind, which perhaps, we are not ſo capable of expreſſing, when we are in the view of others. The preſence of others oftentimes reſtrains the inward vehemencies of Devotion, that we cannot expreſs our ſelves with that vigour, and earneſtneſs of Action, which, if we were alone, we might be prompted to. The truly Religious and Devout Soul is jealous of

Show

Show and Oſtentation, and through the Modeſty of his Religion, is careful to ſuppreſs all thoſe open ways of acting it, from the obſervation of others. Like the truly affectionate *Joſeph*, that would rather chuſe an inner Room, to vent the Fervours of his Love and Affection, in a full flow of Tears, than in the preſence of his Brethren. But in our Cloſets, where no other eye can diſcern or follow us; we may then be as fervent and earneſt as we will. We may then run into the Embraces of God, as zealouſly, and with all the warmth of Affection and Love, as ever two Friends have done, into one another's Arms, when they have no throng to interrupt or wonder at their mutual Endearments. We have then better opportunities for recollecting our wants, or our dangers; as alſo a larger ſcope of expreſſing and urging them with greater importunity. So that, as we have no pretence for coldneſs, or indifferency then, ſo let it be our care and endeavour, by all means, to awaken all the Powers of our Souls to the greateſt heights of Zeal and Devotion that we can arrive at, when we are alone with God.

Our Lord himſelf never pray'd ſo intenſely, or wrought himſelf into ſo deep an Agony, as when he was withdrawn from his Diſciples, to pour out his Soul toward Heaven. He then pray'd, tho' in a cold Night, and in the open Air, till he ſwet drops of Blood. Let

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Let this be our great Concernment, when we get into our Closets, to give all the instances we can, of being in earnest then, when we need not be ashamed of Floods of Tears, or of deepest Groans; but have reason to believe, we have to do with one that *bottles* up the one, and *pities* the other; that keeps a faithful and advantageous Register of all the Evidences of our Zeal and Devotion, where we have taken care, that no eye should observe them but his own. Who as he *sees us in secret*, will *reward us openly*.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all Glory and Praise, now and for ever.

FINIS.

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